

ER on the Beat:

Many law enforcement officers are also EMTs

/Jamie Neal-Ball, Public Information Officer

For officers like Lt. Tracy Steinhoff of the Sturgis Police Department, a traffic stop can be a life-saving event.

Steinhoff was running radar in downtown Sturgis when a sports-utility vehicle whooshed by his cruiser going at least 75 mph. After having to block the SUV with his cruiser to force it to stop, the officer discovered the reason for the rush: a family was trying to get a baby boy who wasn't breathing to the hospital, which was still another five miles away.

"The way they were driving, none of them were going to make it to the hospital," Steinhoff said.

The officer knew what to do. He had recently earned his certification as an emergency medical technician.

Steinhoff is among the many law enforcement officers in Kentucky who are also EMTs. These officers patrol a beat and know about getting hearts to beat – and babies to breathe.

After not finding an object blocking the baby's airway, Steinhoff placed the infant face down on his arm, patted his back and pinched his leg. He immediately began to cry and turned a normal shade of pink, the officer said.

"I don't know what would have happened if I had let them go on to the hospital, but I felt like the baby had a whole lot better chance

that I took it when I did and forced them to stop and get it breathing there and have the ambulance come to us," Steinhoff said about the 2003 incident. "One or the other or all of them weren't going to make it."

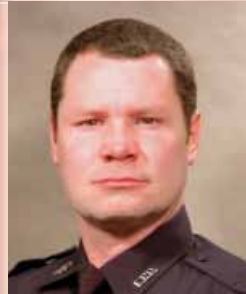
There are more than 10,000 EMTs working in the commonwealth, according to the Kentucky Board of Emergency Medical Services, the certifying body for EMTs in Kentucky.

While the board is approximately a year away from being able to provide statistics on how many of those EMTs are also law enforcement officers, the officer-EMTs "play a crucial role" in delivering medical assistance in their communities when ambulances aren't readily available, said Jon Muncy, director of certification and licensure for the Kentucky Board of Emergency Medical Services.

Some of the officer-EMTs work part time for their local emergency medical service, while others are volunteers with their EMS. But like Steinhoff, the officers said they have needed to put their EMT skills to work while on law-enforcement duty.

Last year, a Shelby County sheriff's deputy was able to help save the life of a fellow deputy because of his training as a paramedic, which is the highest-ranking EMT.

The deputy, Eddie Whitworth, was nearby when he learned that a train had hit Deputy Paul Dugle's vehicle. When Whitworth got to the deputy, he was unconscious, had a mouth full of blood and his breathing was weak,



Officer Ric Bohl



Officer Bryan Hammons



Deputy Don Howard



Lt. Tracy Steinhoff



Deputy Eddie Whitworth



Whitworth said.

Whitworth called for EMS, the fire department medical-transport helicopter from Louisville. He cleaned out Dugle's mouth and opened his airway. The deputy didn't have his paramedic kit nearby. Using a plastic CPR mask that Shelby County deputies carry in the first-aid kit in their cruisers, Whitworth blew air into Dugle's mouth to help him breathe. When EMS arrived, Whitworth inserted an endotracheal tube through Dugle's nose to give him air.

Dugle and his family moved to Texas in May so that he could get treatment at the Center for Neuro Skills in Irving for the injuries he sustained in the train wreck. People who know him have called it a miracle that he lived.

Based on his experiences, Whitworth said he would encourage other officers to further their medical training.

"I would at least do the first responder, if not the EMT, because you just never can tell when you can be put in that situation where you may have the knowledge and the skills to save someone's life," he said.

Law enforcement officers who are also EMTs are vital in many cases because they are often the first to arrive at the scenes of vehicle accidents and other calls that include medical emergencies. This is especially true in large counties, rural areas with lots of hard-to-travel roads and places where the EMS stays busy, because these factors make the response time for ambulances longer, officer-EMTs said.

"If the ambulance is out on the west end of the county, you might be 20 minutes waiting on a truck coming from Grayson," said Chief Bobby Hall of Olive Hill Police Department. "If somebody is having a medical emergency, that's a long time to wait. It really comes in handy knowing somewhat what to do, even if you don't do it every day."

Three of Olive Hill's six full-time officers are also volunteer EMTs, and a part-time officer is a paramedic for the local EMS.

In many communities, officers who are EMTs can have such an impact in emergency-medical situations that their chiefs and sher-

iffs have given the officers the green light to respond to dispatched calls for medical assistance whenever possible.

"Unless I'm tied up on a police call in town, I jump into any medical call in town – whether it's a little old lady that has fallen out of bed, or somebody is in labor, or a heart attack, or whatever it may be," said Cynthiana Police Officer Brian Hassall, who estimated that he responded to up to three medical calls a week while on the job for the police department.

Hassall, who has worked as a volunteer EMT for about five years, is also a volunteer firefighter and search-and-rescue team member.

"We live in a small town, so we all try to throw in, help out when we can," he said.

Dispatchers in Grayson County know that they can call upon Leitchfield Officer Bryan Hammons to respond if he's not working on a police emergency.

"If you can get there within three or four minutes versus the ambulance that's going to be there in 15 minutes, you can make a big difference in somebody's life," Hammons said.

A young girl named Briana is proof of the importance of having an officer-EMT like Hammons available to respond for EMS.

On May 29, 1999, Hammons was on duty with the police department when Grayson County Dispatch sent him to a call where a newborn baby wasn't breathing. The mother had just given birth in the bathroom of her home, and all of the county's ambulance crews were on other runs.

In those days, Hammons didn't carry his medical equipment with him when he was on duty with the police department, so when he arrived at the home, he had to improvise.

The officer cut off the tip of an oral syringe typically used to give children medicine and used it to suction fluid from the baby's airway, and she cried – a sign that she could breathe.

The baby's mother, who said Hammons was "God sent," named her new child Briana – with the alternate spelling of Bryan as the base – in honor of the officer who she believed saved her baby's life.



/Photo by Jamie Neal-Ball

▲ Shelby County Sheriff's Deputy Eddie Whitworth restocks his paramedic kit outside the Oldham County Emergency Medical Service, where he works part time. Whitworth, who also works for the Shelby County EMS, helped save a fellow deputy's life last year after a train hit the car he was driving.

"He's my hero," mother Loretta Mercer said. "Without him I wouldn't have my daughter today, and I know it."

Hammons, who works part time for EMS, said he began carrying his EMT kit at all times after that call.

Erlanger Police Officer Ric Bohl said it was the feeling of being unprepared that made him take a CPR course in high school and then become an EMT seven years before he joined the police force.

Bohl was 10 years old and shopping for school supplies at a K-Mart when a man went into cardiac arrest, he said.

"It kind of scared me and stunned me," he said. "I just didn't know what to do. His wife was yelling for help, and one of the employees

at K-Mart came up and started CPR. From what I understand, he didn't make it ... but just the fact that I felt helpless, and I didn't like that feeling."

Bohl is still a volunteer EMT and said he responds to calls for medical assistance about once per shift with the police department, including vehicle accidents, general illness, and asthma and diabetic attacks.

The officer said that he thinks other officers should at least keep up their CPR and first-aid skills. All Kentucky officers receive at least 12 hours of emergency medical training while in basic training – eight hours of CPR and four hours of first aid.

Some officers should continue on and become certified EMTs "to be able to better





help their community,” Bohl said.

“That’s why we got into policing is to help the community,” he said. “This is just another asset to be able to assist them.”

Fellow officers have told Bohl that they benefited from having some medical training when responding to law-enforcement calls, he said.

“It gives them a little bit of comfort because when they go there, they would get there first and they didn’t know what to do,” Bohl said. “They would just be standing there,

and the family would automatically expect them to know how to assist their loved one. It’s uncomfortable for them to stand there that 10, 20 minutes – whatever it might take for the ambulance to get there – and not be able to do something.”

In some instances, like Bohl’s, law enforcement agencies will pay for their officers’ EMT training and/or recertification every two years. At least one agency in Kentucky – the Blue Grass Airport’s public safety department – requires its officers to be EMTs. The officers are also certified firefighters.

In settings like those that officers working for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and Kentucky’s parks patrol – the woods and the water – officers said it’s especially important for them to have some medical training, although they are not required to be EMTs.

“We are the ambulance until the ambulance gets there or until we can get them to the ambulance,” said KDFWR Officer Richard Waite, who also works part-time for the Jackson County EMS.

Larry McClanahan, a recently retired park ranger at Kincaid Lake State Park in Falmouth, said that many people who visit the state’s parks are out of their element and end up hurting themselves performing activities that they wouldn’t normally do, like chopping wood.

“We’ve done everything out here from air lift to put a Band-Aid on it,” McClanahan said.

McClanahan said being an EMT allowed him to keep ambulances from unnecessarily making trips to the park to treat minor injuries.

While most people would be happy to discover that the officer at the scene of a medical emergency was also an EMT, sometimes the law enforcement uniform confuses them.

Hardin County Deputy Don Howard, who has been a paramedic for 19 years, was preparing to transport a prisoner from a local hospital when the prisoner collapsed in the hospital parking lot.

Nurses who had arrived in the parking lot with a crash cart, which includes emergency medical equipment like defibrillation paddles, would not hand him the paddles so he could determine the prisoner’s heart rhythm, Howard said.

The nurses were thrown by the fact that Howard was wearing a sheriff’s uniform, not a paramedic’s, the deputy said.

Eventually, a doctor arrived, the prisoner’s heart was defibrillated, and he was fine, Howard said.

In Frankfort, an officer who is an EMT is going a step further to help his fellow officers, as well as his community.

Officer Frank Fallis, who is a member of the Frankfort Police Department’s tactical response unit, decided to get certified as a paramedic so he could provide medical assistance to officers or citizens injured at hostage situations or other calls where the tactical unit would be involved, he said.

Fallis said he became inspired to get certified after a squad of paramedics with the local fire department began training with the tactical unit to serve as combat medics during crisis situations.

As an officer and paramedic, Fallis said he would be able to go even further into the “danger zone” at a scene than the squad of paramedics.

Fallis said he also thought all law enforcement officers should at least be certified as EMTs.

Although officers get CPR and first-aid training while in basic training, they may not use or practice those skills after they graduate, Fallis said. EMTs, on the other hand, may keep their skills sharp by using them, and they are required to meet continuing education requirements, he said.

Deputy David Warner of the Graves County Sheriff’s Office, who has been an EMT for 20 years, agreed that officers should consider increasing their medical training.

“The more training, the better – especially in the medical field – because you’re going to be in a situation,” he said. “There’s no doubt about it.” J

■ The Kentucky Law Enforcement Memorial Foundation hosted its sixth annual golf tournament on June 18 at the Gibson Bay Golf Course in Richmond. One hundred players participated in the tournament, and the top four teams were awarded prizes. Other valuable prizes were awarded for closest to the pin, longest drive and the putting contest. Door prizes were also awarded.

The foundation raised more than \$7,000. Proceeds go to the memorial foundation to aid in providing emergency, medical and educational assistance to survivors of fallen officers and serving peace officers and their families. The foundation extends its appreciation to the sponsors and players who helped make the tournament successful.



▼ Leitchfield Officer and EMT Bryan Hammons poses with 8-year-old Briana Manley, who was named in honor of Hammons. Her mother credits Hammons with using his EMT skills to save her daughter’s life the day she was born.



/Photo by Elizabeth Thomas